

The Forms and Structure of International Voluntary Service

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Abstract International voluntary service (IVS) has a significant and growing presence worldwide. IVS is a policy and program tool used for international development aid, humanitarian relief, and promotion of international understanding. In the last century, forms of IVS have proliferated, while research on scope, effectiveness, and impacts has lagged behind. We propose a typology that addresses duration, nature of service, and degree of “internationality.” Further, we identify IVS networks and support organizations that bolster the capacity of IVS sending and hosting organizations, and in this process create large and little recognized international institutions of cooperation. Building on the typology, we suggest program, policy, and research implications to advance knowledge of the role of IVS, its role in global civil society, and impacts it may have on human conditions and cross-cultural understanding.

Keywords Volunteering · International voluntary service · Global civil society · International networks

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Introduction

While global economic and security tensions dominate news headlines, international voluntary service is undergoing a quiet expansion. With roots in nineteenth century missionary work and early twentieth century international peace and post-war reconstruction efforts (Rosenstock-Huessy, 1978), and reflected in William James' vision of service for peaceful purposes (James, 1910), international voluntary service is growing in significance (McBride et al., 2003; Smith et al., 2005). Although precise figures are unknown, increasing numbers of people of all ages are traveling to other countries to perform voluntary service. They serve in many different capacities and for varying periods of time. Some travel abroad with local religious groups to build homes for the poor. Others join workcamps in other countries for a few weeks, building trails in nature reserves or restoring historic structures. Some professionals spend one to two years sharing their knowledge and skills in less-developed countries. Others work on disaster response teams in regions recovering from natural or human-made disasters. Still others take a year out from their studies (the so-called "gap year"), volunteering and learning more about the world and themselves.

Meanwhile, knowledge about international voluntary service (IVS) is very limited. While other sectors of global civil society have received scrutiny (Baker, 2002; Kaldor, 2003; Shaw, 1994; Taylor, 2004), relatively little research addresses the expanding role of IVS, its role in global civil society, or its impacts (McBride & Daftary, 2005; Perry & Imperial, 2001; Woods, 1981). This paper takes stock of the forms and structure of IVS, and examines how IVS is organized and implemented. In the conclusion, we reflect on possible new directions in IVS in the context of an increasingly interdependent and global world, and propose a research agenda to advance knowledge of the role of IVS in global civil society and the impacts it may have on human conditions and cross-cultural understanding.

Institutions of international cooperation and global civil society

International institutions, including those in the global civil society sector, have flourished since the end of the Second World War. They play an increasingly important role in international cooperation (Kaldor, 2003), especially when nation states fail to promote global peace, international understanding, and the well being of the world's poor.

Global civil society is comprised of: (a) international social networks and social movements that focus on poverty, peace, the environment, labor, indigenous and women's rights, and other issues (Keck & Sikkink, 1998); (b) formal organizations that link national institutions, such as trade unions, churches, media, and educational institutions; and, (c) globalist organizations with global missions and memberships, such as Greenpeace or Amnesty International (Shaw, 1994, p. 650).¹ Global civil society operates through multiple pathways. It pressures governments and shapes world opinion, intervenes directly to benefit particular groups, promotes structural change, and creates new institutions (Baker, 2002; Ghils,

¹ Some scholars point out that this inclusive definition fails to discriminate between nongovernmental organizations which "might often more accurately be portrayed as adjuncts to the sphere of the state rather than as phenomena of civil society," and social movements which are generally considered "phenomena of civil society" (Rootes, 2002, pp. 412–413; Taylor, 2004, p. 3). For the purposes of this paper, however, we adopt a broad definition and recommend further research to assess which aspects of IVS can be considered part of global civil society.

1992). Global civil society organizations vary widely in their approach to decision-making, leadership, communications, and governance (Clark, 2003, p. 6).

The growth of global civil society increases potential for attention to key issues and more inclusive participation. Civil society organizations address impacts of globalization on the environment, human rights, and social welfare. In doing so, global civil society organizations provide a way for ordinary people to get involved in global affairs. As Mary Kaldor points out, the focus of civil society “is public affairs, not the market” (p. 48), and provides space where people engage from below in “politics” (2003, pp. 45–46). Thus, global civil society raises new concerns and gives voice to groups previously excluded from discussions of global issues. This may represent a kind of “global democratization from below” (Baker, 2002, p. 932; Falk, 1995).

While many applaud global civil society as a movement towards inclusion and global democracy, others are more cautious, pointing out that many of these institutions are neither democratic nor accountable, and are typically led by northern countries and elite groups (Baker, 2002; Batliwala, 2002; Clark, 2003; Florini, 2003; Scholte, 2000). Baker (2002), for example, argues that global civil society organizations represent the interests of some groups over others. This ought to be of particular concern given that, on the basis of the uneven spread of power and resources, most global civil society organizations are actually thoroughly Western (many based in, even resourced by, Western states) and the majority of the world’s citizens are more adequately conceptualized as objects rather than subjects of such organizations (Baker, 2002, p. 937).

Despite these limitations, global civil society has potential to promote international understanding and human welfare. In this paper, we focus on this potential by examining international voluntary service, a rapidly expanding international phenomenon that straddles governmental and global civil society sectors.

What is international voluntary service?

Voluntary service is defined by Michael Sherraden (2001) as “an organized period of engagement and contribution to society sponsored by public or private organizations, and recognized and valued by society, with no or minimal monetary compensation to the participant.”² In national voluntary service, participants devote their time and energy domestically, while in IVS, participants serve at least part of the time in another country.

IVS varies along several dimensions (see Table 1), and the section below discusses the two principal types of IVS: service that promotes international understanding and service that provides development aid and humanitarian relief (Smith et al., 2005). These are further distinguished by the nature of service, including group or individual placements, and by the duration of service, including short-term (approximately 1 to 8 weeks), medium-term (3 to 6 months), or long-term (6 months or more). Finally, IVS can also be assessed by its degree of internationality, or how much international exposure volunteers actually experience.

² Although Sherraden uses the term “civic service,” we prefer to use “voluntary service” in the context of international service because civic service is broad in its conceptualization, including mandatory forms of service such as service-learning in secondary and post-secondary educational institutions and national service under some political regimes, e.g., Nigeria and Israel.

Table 1 Type and duration of international voluntary service: Examples

	IVS for international understanding		IVS for development aid and humanitarian relief	
	Short-term ^a	Medium- to-long term ^a	Short-term	Medium-to-long-term
Group service	Youth participate in workcamp to develop a nature reserve in Thailand	Team of Mexican and Canadian volunteers work with street children in Mexico	Team of nurses and doctors provide eye surgeries in rural villages in Botswana	Multidisciplinary teams work on post-tsunami reconstruction in Indonesia
Individual service	European volunteer in summer camp in USA	German volunteer serves in home for people with special needs in Hungary	Japanese structural engineer assists rebuilding efforts in post-earthquake Pakistan	Indian agricultural expert working on agricultural development in SE-Asia

^aShort-term is 1 to 8 weeks, medium-term is more than 3 months to 6 months, and long-term is 6 months or more.

IVS for international understanding

IVS for international understanding includes programs that foster cross-cultural understanding, global citizenship, and global peace. These programs typically do not require that volunteers possess special skills or qualifications other than a willingness to learn and serve. Although the importance of the service projects and their contribution to communities is a vital part of the program, the emphasis in IVS for international understanding is on the international experience and the contributions to cross-cultural skills, civic engagement, personal development, commitment to voluntarism, and fostering development of global awareness among volunteers. There may also be significant effects on host communities. Even short-term service programs sometimes have a long-term presence as projects take place consecutively in the same host communities, sometimes over a period of years. Youth and young adult volunteers predominate in this type of service.

IVS programs for international understanding usually are operated by nongovernmental organizations with funding from private sources, including money raised by the volunteers themselves. Public funding is less common, although some countries fund these programs through national voluntary service (Italy) or youth ministry budgets (Germany and France). There are signs, however, that this may be changing. The Norwegian and Dutch governments, for example, recently included in their foreign affairs budgets line items to pay for young people to engage in volunteering as “citizen diplomats.” Typically, however, volunteers cover their own travel and living expenses, although some organizations cover some of these costs or pay a stipend, especially for longer-term service. Most IVS for international understanding falls into short-term group service and medium- and long-term group and individual service.³

³ Some organizations are considering short-term individual service, especially for older adults in life-long learning programs, such as recent experiments funded by the Grundtvig program of the European Union, a Europe-wide project in which exchanges introduce volunteers to local services and techniques for working with people with disabilities or learning difficulties (www.red2green.org).

Short-term group service

Short-term group service usually takes the form of workcamps with young people in teams from different countries. With origins in peace and reconciliation efforts in Europe following the First and Second World Wars (Rosenstock-Huessy, 1978; Woods, 1981), workcamps are “a multicultural, voluntary workforce” that bring together people from different countries to work on community projects (SCI, 2005a). Volunteers may serve in only one country (although they can re-enlist to serve in other locations in the future). Over time, workcamps have spread to other continents.

Typically, volunteers build community centers, develop social or educational institutions, or, more recently, participate in eco-camps where teams plant trees, lay out pathways through nature reserves, or erect fences and protective barriers. There are also camps where volunteers run activities for children and youth from deprived families during the summer, or organize cultural and sports activities in a poor neighborhood. Eligibility is determined usually by age (e.g., must be 18 or older), and a willingness to attend an orientation or short training course and serve with energy and enthusiasm. Most projects require few technical or professional skills. The focus is on the volunteers learning together through service. In some projects, an international mix of volunteers intensifies the experience.

In the early years, volunteers in this type of service were adults, but today workcamps reach out to volunteers of all ages, from young adolescents to retirees. Many programs incorporate informal education that facilitates cross-cultural understanding, personal development, and skill enhancement. In addition to travel and other expenses, short-term volunteers in these programs usually pay fees to organizations that arrange the experiences. Workcamp programs are typically affiliated with an international network of organizations (discussed later) that link volunteers, sending organizations, and host organizations.

Despite the brevity of workcamps, studies have shown that they can have lasting impact on cultural awareness years after the project. Thomas, Abt, and Chang (2005), for example, document long-term effects of workcamps that range from a “nice-to-have” experience to transformative experiences in volunteers’ lives.

Medium- to long-term individual and group service

Opportunities for longer-term service have increased in recent years. Some long-term programs have developed out of workcamp programs, in response to volunteer and host community requests. Other long-term programs have developed out of national service programs. Others were set up by organizations working for peace, for intercultural learning, or for ecumenical exchange. In long-term service, there is greater focus on learning about the host culture through immersion.

Instead of workcamp projects, medium-to-long-term service usually is linked to community service organizations, such as schools, homes for people with special needs, immigrant support centers, or environmental organizations. There is typically greater emphasis on the cross-cultural learning by hosts and volunteers. These programs also expect that volunteers will educate their community and country of origin upon their return. In addition, the IVS experience is expected to impact the volunteer’s future vocational and extracurricular activities. Some studies find significant impacts in all these areas (Becker, et al., 2000; Rahrbach, et al., 1998), although there is little systematic research on lasting impacts.

In long-term programs, group service is less common than individual service. Most well known are bilateral team models used in Canada World Youth and Swedish World Youth. In both programs, teams of 10 to 16 young people, composed of volunteers from two countries

equally, work and live together for six months or more, first in one country then in the other (CWY, 2006).

IVS for development aid and humanitarian relief

IVS programs that provide development aid and humanitarian relief (referred to in this paper as “development and relief”) focus on the expertise and experience which volunteers bring to their assignments. Although educational value of the experience for the volunteer and impact on international understanding are not ignored, these goals are secondary to skills and transfer of technology provided by the volunteer, especially contributions to reconstruction and/or sustainable development. For example, the International Committee of the Red Cross recruits people for short periods whose skills are needed in a natural disaster (nurses, epidemiologists, rescue teams with dogs) or in a post-war recovery (planners, administrators, sanitation engineers). Increasingly, development and relief service programs recruit older adults and retired professionals in which volunteers make a full-time commitment for a certain period of service or commit to episodic service over several years.

Development and relief is organized both by governments (e.g., Peace Corps, Japanese Overseas Cooperation Volunteers, and Deutscher Entwicklungsdienst), and by nongovernmental organizations (e.g., International Red Cross, Médecins Sans Frontiers, and Canadian University Services Overseas). Funding is usually provided through the foreign affairs or the foreign aid budget. Increasingly, governments support NGO-run schemes (Germany, Norway, France). In government-funded programs, volunteers often receive a stipend, travel, and benefits. In NGO-funded programs, individuals typically cover their own travel and living expenses, although some organizations cover a portion of these costs or pay a stipend, especially for long-term service.

Short-term group and individual service

Short-term group and individual voluntary service programs are most common in response to natural disasters and health projects. For example, German Technisches Hilfswerk (THW, Technical Help Service) volunteers were deployed to New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina in 2005 to help with pumping out the water from the city. Former Peace Corps volunteers were also sent to help coordinate relief. In other situations, medical teams are sent (often by religious groups) to impoverished rural areas to do corrective surgery for specific maladies beyond the capacity of local health services. The amount and quality of training that volunteers receive for service in an international setting depends very much on the philosophy of the sending organization.

Medium- to long-term individual service

Longer-term development and relief service programs typically recruit professionals and technicians to work alongside nationals. For example, volunteers may be recruited to introduce new teaching techniques or to develop microfinance schemes. Programs include United Nations Volunteers, Peace Corps, Voluntary Service Overseas, Deutscher Entwicklungsdienst (DED, German Development Service), and Stichting Internationale Vrijwilligers (SIV, Dutch Volunteer Service). Individual service enables technology transfer to host communities where specific skills and resources are not readily available. Skilled volunteers come from many countries and work alongside local professionals. This represents a significant shift from the 1960s when development and relief volunteering was viewed as a vertical

transfer of skills from developed countries to less developed countries. Qualified volunteers serving for longer periods typically go through a more comprehensive pre-service training of several weeks or months. Long-term service by professionals serving in groups is rare.

Degree of internationality

Another way to distinguish among IVS programs is by degree of internationality: unilateral, bilateral, multilateral, and transnational. In unilateral IVS the flow of volunteers is one-way: an organization sends a volunteer to one country and an organization in the host country receives them. There is an agreement between sending and hosting organizations (or between the volunteer and the hosting organization) regulating the project. The Nigerian Technical Aid Corps and the Japanese Overseas Cooperative Volunteers (JOCV) are examples.

In this model, the sending organization defines the parameters of the program, chooses the participants, is legally responsible for them, provides most of the funding, helps to place volunteers, and provides other in-country support. Host country partners provide placements for volunteers chosen by the sending organization. Hosting organization staff may have some responsibilities for orientation and support of the volunteers in country, but as subcontractors of the sending organization. This is perhaps the most common way of organizing international service. Service may be short, medium, or long term and may include individual and/or group placements.

In bilateral and multilateral voluntary service, two or more organizations in two or more countries agree to send volunteers to each other. The mutuality of the exchange is an important part of the relationship, although the numbers exchanged do not have to be equally balanced. Bilateral exchanges may be organized between organizations that are members of an international network with a common philosophy and standards, but the essential characteristic is bilateral. The hosting organization may have meetings, training, or seminars for volunteers from several countries, as well as domestic volunteers as part of its program.

Volunteers in workcamps come from a variety of different sending organizations but serve together in one country with one organization responsible for the camp itself. It is generally accepted policy that no one nationality should dominate within an international workcamp (CCIVS, 2004). Nonetheless, placements are made individually, and are guided by agreements between the hosting organization and each sending organization. This is the basic model of exchange between members of the Ecumenical Diaconal Year Network (EDYN), International Cultural Youth Exchange (ICYE), Service Civil International (SCI), the Alliance of European Voluntary Service organizations, and Youth Action for Peace (YAP). Volunteers may also serve individually or in small teams, but usually train together and meet to discuss and reflect on their volunteer experiences.

Multilateral projects are partnerships among a number of organizations that design and implement the project together. Perhaps the most innovative sector of IVS, multilateral projects are more difficult to create and implement because they require the cooperating organizations to develop a common vision and management structure. For example, three multilateral projects funded under the European Voluntary Service (Envol, Creative Co-operations, and Step-by-Step) were made up of members in five or more countries who decided to promote IVS among socially, economically, and otherwise disadvantaged young people (Alliance-EVS, 2005; AVSO, 2003). The process undertaken by these organizations—creating common selection and training protocols and making joint applications for funding from the European Commission—required extensive discussion and cooperation among participating organizations. Another example is the Roma–Gadje Dialogue through Service (RGDTS) initiative, a project that brings together Roma and non-Roma partners working

across Europe to develop greater awareness about the situation of Roma in Europe. Partner organizations in The Netherlands, Germany, Italy, Slovakia, Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania, Russia, Ukraine, and the United States work together to provide staff for training and exchange sessions, submit common funding applications, and evaluate the direction of the project.

Transnational voluntary service can be considered a particular form of multilateral voluntary service, but it is set apart here because the international dimension is intensified. While multilateral programs involve volunteers from two or more countries serving together in one country, in transnational programs, volunteers from two or more countries serve in a multinational group on consecutive projects in more than one country. Canada World Youth, for example, sponsors bi-national volunteer groups comprised of Canadians and volunteers from another country in which each group spends half of its time in Canada and the other half of its time in the partner country, thus they have an international and bicultural experience. In another example, a pilot program in North America (2000–2003) incorporated volunteers from Canada, the United States, and Mexico working together in three projects of three months each in the three countries (Sherraden, *in press*; Sherraden & Benítez, 2003).

IVS programs

Table 2, below, applies the dimensions discussed above to eight well-known IVS programs. The programs illustrate the growing interest in internationality in IVS programs. They include four international understanding IVS programs—South African Student Volunteers, Canada Crossroads International, Internationaler Christlicher Jugendaustausch, and Canada World Youth—and four development and relief IVS programs: Peace Corps; Japan Overseas Co-operative Volunteers; United Nations Volunteers; and Voluntary Service Overseas. Funding for international understanding IVS relies on private funding and some public funding, while funding for development and relief IVS comes largely from public sources. International understanding programs are usually fairly small, although this selection includes three—SCI, ICYE, and Canadian World Youth (CWY)—that have greater reach. Development and relief IVS usually accommodates more volunteers and operates in many countries. Periods of service are also longer among the development and relief programs, although some of the other types have also introduced options for volunteers to serve for longer periods.

In these examples, eligibility requirements reflect program goals. For example, development and relief programs require professional and technical expertise and recruit older volunteers compared to international understanding programs, which lack skill and experience requirements but typically do not provide a stipend, and often require fees.

Some programs are more inclusive than others, that is, they work to recruit volunteers who are disadvantaged (e.g., ethnic minorities, people with disabilities, or with low incomes), although there is no clear pattern among types of IVS programs. Factors that decrease inclusiveness are recruitment strategies aimed at the better educated and expectations that volunteers will pay program participation fees. Costs may be related to transportation or accommodation, although some programs attempt to ameliorate the impact (CWY and Canada Crossroads International) by assisting participants in seeking community sponsorship and providing funding for low-income participants. The European Union provides special funding to increase the numbers of less-advantaged youth to participate in IVS (EVS, 2001). Research on volunteers in the European Community suggests that factors that prevent marginalized youth from volunteering have mostly to do with family history, culture, and lack

Table 2 Characteristics of selected international voluntary civic service programs

	IVS for international understanding			IVS for development aid and humanitarian relief			
	SASV Southern African Student Volunteers (1993)	CCI Canada Crossroads International (1950s)	ICJA Freiwilligen-austausch Weltweit (1949)	PC Peace Corps (1961)	JOCV Japan Overseas Volunteers (1965)	UNV United Nations Volunteers (1971)	VSO Voluntary Service Overseas (1957)
Funding	Public Private	Public	Public Private	Public ^d	Public ^d	Public ^d	Public Private
Duration of service	3 weeks to 6 months	11 to 14 weeks, 4 to 6 months	3–12 months	2 years	1 to 2 years	2 to 12 months, 1 to 2 years	Up to 2 years
Number of volunteers/year (or currently serving)	1,000 (N/A)	300	170	7,000	2,500 (2000)	7,300 (2004)	1,500
Number of countries where volunteers serve	16	16	30	72	72 (2000)	139	6
Age of volunteers	17–25	19+	18+	18+	20–69	25+	18–25, 20–75
Eligibility and participation requirements	Students	Application, Fees ^b	Application, Fees	College degree	Technical expertise	Technical expertise	Technical expertise
Inclusiveness ^c	Medium	High	N/A	Low	Medium	Low	High
Flow of volunteers ^d	SAF-to-SAF	C-to-S S-to-C	N-to-S S-to-N	US-to-N US to-S	J-to-N J-to-S	S-to-S N-to-S	N-to-S S-to-S
Degree of internationality	Multilateral	Multilateral	Multilateral	Unilateral	Unilateral	Multilateral	Unilateral
Quasi-supranational organization	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Sources: Organization web pages, personal communication, and program documents.

^a These programs also receive donations and other private funds, but most funding is public.

^b Only Canadian participants are required to raise their participation fees, not participants from other countries. The programs assist with fund raising and fees are waived in some instances.

^c High inclusiveness means that the program has a specific policy in place to include and help support disadvantaged volunteers (e.g., income, disability) or ethnic minorities. Medium means that the program is open to all, but there are fees and other requirements that may limit participation. There may be support for volunteers helping them raise the fees or meet participation requirements. Low means that fees and other requirements may make it difficult to participate.

^d Saf = South Africa, C = Canada, S = Global South, N = Global North, US = United States, J = Japan.

of self-confidence rather than finances (AVSO, 2003, 2004), but more research on inclusion is needed.

Most volunteer flow is either between developed areas of the world, or from developed areas to less developed areas of the world. There are growing efforts to provide opportunities in other directions and across less developed areas of the world. Table 2 provides several examples, including: Voluntary Service Overseas and United Nations Volunteers, which send volunteers from North-to-South and South-to-South; Southern African Student Volunteers which sends volunteers from Southern African countries to other countries in Southern Africa; and, Canada Crossroads International, Canada World Youth, and ICJA Freiwilligenaustausch Weltweit, which send groups of volunteers in both directions in the south and the north.

Although all of these programs are international, there are differences in the degree of internationality. These differences reflect program goals and funding. International understanding programs are more likely to be multilateral or transnational. Although they may start as unilateral programs, IVS programs for international understanding are more susceptible to global civil society pressures to become more representative. Furthermore, the emphasis on cross-cultural understanding, global citizenship, and global peace and solidarity among all partners encourages multilateral structure and membership. The emergence of the European Federation for Intercultural Learning (EFIL), which is designed to coordinate exchange activities in the previously unilateral American Field Service (now called AFS), is an example of how bilateral IVS develops from a unilateral, program. At the same time, “gap year” programs of the commercial variety are unilateral, and will likely continue to be because of the financial interest involved (Simpson, 2004).

Development and relief programs tend to be unilateral because most are national government initiatives, and therefore, their aims tend to be linked to foreign policy. Also, the emphasis in IVS for development and relief is on skill and technology transfer. A major exception is United Nations Volunteers, whose mission is global and not national.

Finally, as we see in Table 2, five of the programs have developed supranational organizations, which we call international voluntary service networks (IVSNs), which handle key aspects of program decision-making. This development is addressed in the next section.

Structure and implementation of IVS

As IVS has expanded, it has also become more complex organizationally. Over the last 40 years, three organizational structures have emerged to support the implementation of IVS. These—to be discussed in turn—include international voluntary service organizations (IVSO), international voluntary service networks (IVSN), and international voluntary service support (IVSPs) organizations.

International Voluntary Service Organizations (IVSOs) are the national organizations and programs that send and/or receive international volunteers. They may fund and support host organizations who receive volunteers (placements), or they may be the host organizations themselves. IVSOs are on the “front-line,” so to speak. They implement IVS. Some are organizations whose main business is voluntary service. Others are organizations with a thematic focus, such as social welfare or environmental education agencies that run an IVS program as part of their total operation. Most IVSOs focus on and operate within one nation, within a region, or a community. Some only send volunteers, some only host, and some do both. If they send volunteers they typically only send local residents, but a few send volunteers from other countries as well. Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO), for example,

has done this in recent years (Table 2). Some IVSOs send or host only a few volunteers, others work with hundreds each year.

Some IVSOs also operate national voluntary service programs. Some integrate international volunteers with national volunteers, while others operate them as separate programs. For example, Community Service Volunteers (CSV) in the United Kingdom, which began as a national service program, now hosts over 500 international volunteers from every continent. A similar development has taken place within organizations under the Voluntary Social and Ecological Year legislation in Germany. An estimated 700 foreign volunteers come to Germany each year to participate. In both of these cases the foreign volunteers are integrated into the national voluntary service programs, and have contact with national volunteers in placements and educational events. This expansion of national voluntary service programs into international voluntary service has been largely overlooked.

Faith-based IVSOs include both types of IVS.⁴ For example, the Evangelical Lutheran Church (USA) and the Presbyterian Church (USA) have mission programs that place qualified adults for periods of two years or more, and young adult volunteers programs that place young adults straight out of college abroad for one year. Similar programs exist in most American protestant denominations and within organizations of the Roman Catholic Church (USA). Some of these programs focus solely on civic service, while others also involve evangelism.

International Voluntary Service Networks (IVSNs) provide leadership and help coordinate the work of IVSOs. Precise functions vary according to the philosophy and structure of each network. Most networks: (1) develop a common vision for the network; (2) enable members to implement the IVSN vision, including facilitating, guiding, and supporting the work of IVSOs in the network, providing training for IVSO member organization staff, providing a central location (postal address, telephone and/or website) for volunteers to learn about the range of volunteer opportunities in the network, and linking volunteers to the member IVSOs; (3) coordinate through data-gathering, monitoring, and feedback; and, (4) bring member organizations together through conferences and other activities. Other important functions include a board of directors chosen by and from the membership, annual financial reporting, transferring funds internationally without excessive controls, and assistance obtaining visas and work permits. In the absence of an international legal status for nongovernmental organizations, the legal form of IVSNs is based on laws of the countries where they are incorporated.

IVSNs may have a global or regional focus and their memberships may overlap. For example, YAP, ICYE, SCI, and the Federation for the Experiment in International Living are global IVSNs, although each is more involved in one region than in others. Regional IVSNs include the Network for Voluntary Development in Asia (NVDA, 2006), the Eastern African Workcamps Association (EAWA), and the Southern African Workcamps for Cooperation (SAWC) currently based in Botswana (CCIVS, 2006a). Another example is the Alliance of European Voluntary Service Organizations (Alliance), a European based network with North American and Asian associate organizations. Both regional *and* global, European members of Alliance have full access to decision-making, while non-European associates have only access to the exchange mechanisms. The Alliance functions as a meeting place. It enables its members (IVSOs) to develop projects by helping to convene and develop joint projects. Alliance is an example of an IVSN of the international understanding type. *Médicins Sans Frontiers* is an example of an IVSN of the development and relief type.

⁴ In this paper, we do not address missionary service, although some consider this a type of IVS.

International Voluntary Service Support (IVSSs) organizations support, fund, conduct research, and advocate for international voluntary service. Although some of the indirect functions of IVSSs overlap with IVSNs, IVSSs are not engaged directly in coordinating or managing volunteer placements, nor in directing the work of IVSOs. Most existing IVSSs are based in Europe, which has the longest history of international voluntary service and where public policies have promoted youth voluntary service (domestic and international) for many decades.

The oldest and largest support organization is the Coordinating Committee for International Voluntary Service (CCIVS), a worldwide coordinating body of international voluntary service programs that has formal associate relations with the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (Unesco). Established in the aftermath of the First World War under the aegis of Unesco, CCIVS was created “to help reconstruct Europe, both physically and in terms of bringing former enemy populations together” (CCIVS, 2006b). Until the 1990s, CCIVS played an important role in bringing together Western and Eastern countries. One of its international member organizations, Service Civil International (SCI) was particularly active in the promotion of East–West workcamps. For example, 166 Czechoslovak volunteers participated in projects of the British branch of SCI in the Cold War period (Gillette, 1968). Beginning in the 1980s, CCIVS expanded its operations to include all world continents. Some of its most active members today are in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. By assisting in approximately 100,000 international exchanges annually, CCIVS’ aims to improve the quality of exchanges through training, seminars, campaigns on global issues, and provision of pedagogic material, as well as adoption of international standards. Overall, CCIVS focuses on reciprocal international cooperation in development to achieve material and social equality between countries and their peoples. Its members are IVSOs, national IVSNs (e.g., Cotravail in France or UMAC in Morocco), and global IVSNs (e.g., ICYE, SCI, EFIL, and YAP).

The Association for Voluntary Service Organisations (AVSO) promotes full-time voluntary service for international understanding in Europe, especially long-term service. Its members are IVSOs (e.g., Althla in Italy), IVSNs with members in one country only (e.g., Action Committee Service for Peace in Germany), and international IVSNs with members in Europe (e.g., ICYE and EDYN). While CCIVS’ focus is explicitly global and historically more focused on short-term service, AVSO functions as a meeting place for organizations promoting long-term IVS for international understanding and lobbying in Europe for IVS. In fact, AVSO was founded in 1989 as a lobbying platform for voluntary service organizations in the Council of Europe and the European Union, but has since expanded its mission to include information dissemination, partnership building, and research. AVSO also carries out multilateral projects to develop voluntary service. For example, it helped to develop voluntary service with 200 organizations in Central and Eastern Europe that had little prior experience or knowledge of voluntary service.

European Voluntary Service (EVS) is a funding stream of the European Union Youth Programme and is the largest single supporter of IVS for international understanding. It only funds voluntary organizations if the placements have been reviewed and approved by EVS, including volunteer training events. In general, EVS does not conduct research, although it monitors voluntary service that occurs under the aegis of EVS programs. EVS aims to enhance participant development, build European identity, foster community service, and enhance international cooperation through intercultural learning. All European Union member states take part; EVS financially supports organizations that exchange over 3,000 young volunteers each year within Europe; EVS also supports a limited number of exchanges with other countries that have financial agreements with the European Union and have been

accepted as Youth Programme members, including Iceland, Norway, and Turkey. EVS policy encourages organizations to become both hosting and sending organizations, and to develop multilateral activities.

Discussion and conclusion

In this paper we have explored the characteristics and structure of IVS as it is situated in a global civil society. The two main types of international voluntary service—for international understanding and for development and relief—have distinct implications for the nature of the volunteer service, program design, funding and support, relationships with host communities, and impacts on volunteers and hosts.

IVS for international understanding focuses on recruiting unskilled and inexperienced (and usually younger) volunteers to participate in programs designed to build connections across national borders, develop intercultural sensitivity and tolerance, increase global consciousness, encourage international solidarity, and promote international peace and understanding. IVS for international understanding tends to be carried out in groups and for relatively short periods of time. Funding comes from the private sector primarily, and organizations that operate this type of IVS tend to be small and affiliated with international network and support organizations. A growing number of these types of organizations have developed bilateral, multilateral, or transnational programs.

In contrast, IVS for development and relief recruits skilled and experienced (usually older) technicians and professionals who provide expertise to communities and nations where skill-based assistance is needed. This type of service may be long or short term, but tends to be performed by individual volunteers rather than groups. Funding usually comes from national or international governmental sources, and programs are more likely to be unilateral.

Pitfalls

Wealthier countries are most likely to fund and operate IVS programs (of both types), and as a result, IVS is largely limited to volunteers from these countries. North-to-North and North-to-South flows of volunteers dominate, although there are a few more South-to-South programs in recent years. South-to-North IVS programs are rare. Sending countries set the service agenda and their volunteers stand the most to benefit (Grusky, 2000; Simpson, 2004; Smith & Elkin, 1981; Worrice & Senior, 1994). A sending country bias may result in volunteers who seek personal benefit over service and exchange with persons in the host community. Perhaps the most negative examples of this can be found in vacation-oriented trips and in some “gap year” programs, which according to Kate Simpson, result too often in viewing the “third world other . . . dominated by simplistic binaries of ‘us and them’” (Simpson, 2004, p. 690).

In this context, service can degenerate into little more than a “vacation with meaning” or a way to enhance a personal resume. Volunteers in IVS for international understanding may also be unprepared to make useful contributions. Unilateral programs that dominate IVS for development and relief may pay greater attention to geopolitical advantages than to development reconstruction of host communities and nations (Rodell, 2002).

These concerns lead to questions about the extent to which IVS contributes to a global civil society. To relate it to Rupert Taylor’s words, IVS “seeks to reclaim democracy and reconfigure power by generating a sense of global citizenship within which there is increasing awareness of how social issues—near or far—that were once differentially focused and

geographically founded are actually interpenetrated and interdependent” (2004, p. 9). While sometimes overstated, criticisms of IVS raise important questions about the achievement of these goals. Going forward, fostering bilateral, multinational, and transnational programs based on principles of “mutuality and reciprocity” (Rockliffe, 2005) will be fundamentally more important.

New directions

This paper is a first step in providing a framework and parameters for researchers to use, so they may communicate with each other more clearly as they examine the growing number and changing characteristics of IVS programs. Hopefully, this paper helps lay the groundwork for more rigorous research to understand IVS and inform its development.

The proposed typology may serve as a heuristic device, simplifying the complex reality of IVS. But with simplification comes imprecision. In reality, changing emphases and new directions are continually developing. While IVS for international understanding in the early years dealt with aid and relief, over the years these functions have separated. Today there is evidence of new changes in the field, and lines between types of IVS are once again blurring. For example, IVS workcamps have begun to address functions traditionally reserved for development and relief. After the tsunami of 2004, for example, several organizations organized workcamps focusing on social activities in shelters and helped with cleaning and reconstruction in Thailand and India (Field Services and Intercultural Learning, 2006; Greenway, 2006; SCI, 2005b). Social activities and construction have also been organized in areas of ethnic conflict, such as projects in Kenya working with the Masaai and Kuria (CCIVS, 2006a), and in Palestine during the second Intifada, where international volunteers have worked with children and youth through the International Palestinian Youth League (2006). Similarly, in IVS for development and relief, organizations that only focus on technical skills are beginning to promote programs for international understanding. For example, a United Nations Volunteers (UNV) project in the Balkans encourages young people from EU Youth Programme countries to work together with UNV development volunteers in Bosnia-Herzegovina (UNV, 2006).

At the same time, some governments have begun to support IVS for international understanding. In the European Union, the creation of EVS suggests that political leaders view IVS for international understanding as vital to its future. The Dutch government has decided to fund 1,000 young people in IVS for international understanding from its foreign aid budget. The British government’s new youth voluntary service scheme, based on the Russell Commission report, also foresees funding young people volunteering abroad. In Canada, the government not only supports CUSO (IVS for development and relief), but also Canada World Youth and Canadian Crossroads International (IVS for international understanding).

Some governments also fund programs where volunteers from the South are placed in the North. For example, the Norwegian government supports two-way exchanges for both types of IVS. As a result of its review of Fredekorpsset (Norway’s well-established IVS development and relief program set up originally along the lines of the U.S. Peace Corps) in 2000, policymakers came to the conclusion that supporting NGOs efforts to send and receive unskilled young people as volunteers is not only good for youth, but also fosters Norway’s foreign relations and development objectives. Similarly, Canadian government funding for Canada World Youth supports international volunteers in Canada from the Global North and South, as well as opportunities for Canadians to volunteer abroad.

Despite these advances and keen interest by potential volunteers in the Global South, funding and logistical difficulties in obtaining visas to Northern countries continue to severely

limit participation, even when IVSOs are sympathetic. Some IVSOs and IVSNs view participation among less advantaged sectors of society as a priority, including those who “would otherwise not have opportunities to travel, meet people from different backgrounds and experience an atmosphere of mutual support” (SCI, no date). In Europe, such programs find support in an explicit policy of the EU Youth Programme, including EVS, which encourage participation of young people with disabilities or socio-economic disadvantage, and ethnic or racial minorities. The EU Youth Programme gives these programs priority in project approvals and provides extra funding for special needs (Adams et al., 1996; AVSO, 2003; Zimmerman, 1995).

Finally, in some limited cases, national voluntary service schemes have been expanded to include IVS. National schemes provide a ready-made (but largely unused) infrastructure that could be adjusted to include international volunteers. Internationalizing these national service schemes could enrich not only the international volunteers, but also the national volunteers. The European Commission unit responsible for EVS has suggested a modest dialogue on this idea as part of the new Youth program (2007–2013), but the initiative has been blocked by a small number of member states that lack national service programs. They may fear being pressured into developing national schemes if they agree.

Building knowledge and understanding about IVS

The cases of Canada, Norway, and the EU raise important policy questions about why certain countries and regions support bilateral, multilateral, and transnational IVS and others do not, and why some countries have embraced IVS for international understanding and others have not. No current research can answer these questions. In fact, beyond examples and anecdotes, we know little about IVS, especially IVS for international understanding. Especially, we know little about IVS in other parts of the world, especially in Asia. What is the extent and reach of IVS? What impacts does it have on hosts and volunteers? Professionals who work in the IVS know how programs work and are convinced of the positive value of results, but little systematic evidence supports these claims.

Despite its potential significance, IVS has received scant academic research attention, which has contributed to its invisibility. Fortunately, there are some exceptions. A call for a research agenda on IVS resulted from a 2005 international conference on “International Service in the Context of Globalization,” sponsored by the Center for Social Development at Washington University in St. Louis and the Institute for Volunteering Research in the United Kingdom. Some conclusions of this meeting were that research on IVS exists for development and relief, but most has been episodic, and limited to service project results (McBride et al., 2005). Some research examines effects on local communities and sensitivity to cultural differences, but this research is mostly aimed at improving pre-departure training for volunteers. Academic research on IVS for international understanding hardly exists. Much of the writing tends to be a snapshot of a service cohort during or immediately after a term of service. Longitudinal studies, other than in-house evaluations by some service organizations are uncommon. The European Union bemoaned this fact in the conclusions of its study of the pilot EVS period (1997–1999), but to date it has not invested in such research.

Future research should systematically examine the impacts of different forms and types of IVS (e.g., IVS for international understanding and for development and relief; short-term and long-term; group and individual; unilateral, multilateral, and transnational). Impacts should be assessed for the volunteers, host organizations, communities, and countries, for sending countries, and for development of global civil society and global relations. Furthermore, as

IVS organizations and nations jockey to position themselves in a changing world, research should also examine organizational forms of IVS in greater detail.

International Voluntary Service programs covered in this paper range from small non-governmental organizations and their networks (e.g., workcamp programs in Alliance), to large nonprofit IVS organizations (e.g., Red Cross), to government-sponsored IVS organizations (e.g., Peace Corps).⁵ The analysis here suggests that the small programs and their networks that promote IVS for international understanding may be more firmly rooted in global civil society than the large government-sponsored IVS for development and relief programs, because the latter are more likely to reflect the goals of donor nations and are more tied to state interests. However, IVS for international understanding can also represent donor interests, possibly even at the expense of recipient communities. Although some IVSNs have participatory structures and norms of inclusion, empirical research is necessary to understand these forms, especially how they relate to national and local level organizations. Further, it is conceivable that IVS for development and relief could be multilateral, inclusive, and democratic. Research should examine more closely the organizational forms of IVS, their relationship to global civil society, and impacts.

Finally, although we know relatively little about emerging multilateral and transnational models of IVS, it is possible that these may lead to constructive and productive thinking about global issues. The structure of IVS organizations, including IVSNs and IVSSs, may provide models for global civil society that build international understanding. Many IVS programs, especially of the international understanding type, have a normative stance that reflects normative definitions of global civil society (Taylor, 2004). They purport to contribute to global perspectives among volunteers, local hosts, and co-volunteers. Research is required to know if this does occur, how, and why. Notwithstanding the potential that such programs are a form of “self service” (McBride & Daftary, 2005, p. 4), some studies suggest that IVS leads to increased understanding of other nations, sensitivity to the Other, understanding of one’s own culture and nationality, increased capacity to function in a global world, plans to work in an international field, and creative thinking about global challenges (Rahrbach et al., 1998; Sherraden & Pearce, 2005). These initial outcomes suggest that IVS should be a focus of critical and systematic research. Such research may provide insight into when and how some forms and structures of IVS contribute to the development of global citizenship and global civil society.

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⁵ IVS could also include social movement-type service, informal international exchanges, and community service among allied groups, such as unions or environmental groups. These informal arrangements are not addressed in this paper.

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